



Rarak youths chanting to the accompaniment of hand drums (rebana) on the afternoon preceding a wedding.

All photos accompanying the following article are by Peter Goethals, 1955.

## KARANG RARAK: A 1955 VIGNETTE

Peter R. Goethals

From the patchwork of gardens and rice terraces surrounding Sumbawa's lowland capital town, a narrow, rutted road winds away into the island's interior mountains to the southwest. Near several plank-fronted Chinese shops and no more than a stone's throw from the former sultan's palace, this road intersects one of the town's three paved streets. At this intersection on a July morning at sunrise I had arranged to meet Anin, a friend from the mountain village of Rarak, so that we could make our return trip to the village together while the morning was still cool. On foot this trip usually took us about two hours and a half.<sup>1</sup>

The sky was already pale when Anin came into sight. He was late, for the barrel-sized drum of the town mosque had thumped out its dawn (waja Subu) call to prayer fifteen minutes earlier, and he had urged that we meet no later than the dawn call in order to get an early start.

As he approached Anin shifted slightly the carrying pole (palëmar) that he hefted across his right shoulder, smiled and gave me a general greeting, "Sila mo." To jar him awake I replied as if he had greeted me as another Muslim: "Alaikum Wassalam." With that he grinned and then apologized for being late. Without further conversation we set out, starting down through the banana and palm groves at the edge of town and following the road to its fording place at the Sumbawa river.

Anin was dressed in gray cotton shorts which were relatively new and thus neither patched nor frayed at the pockets; they contrasted sharply with the ragged working shorts that he wore at home in Rarak. A clean white undershirt and a black pitji completed his typical travelling garb. Like most upland farmers,

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1. This piece, originally written in 1958 and revised slightly in 1967, is based upon field work conducted during three visits, totalling 17 months, to western Sumbawa between March 1954 and April 1956, which was made possible by the support and assistance of the Ford Foundation and the Institute of Linguistic and Cultural Research of the University of Indonesia. The incidents and observations given here are synthesized from my total field work period on Sumbawa and therefore do not describe any single, historically real day. My purpose is to provide an informal, unstructured glimpse of Rarak village (Karang Rarak) and its people as this might be reported by an outside visitor with some previous familiarity with the area and the community.

Anin wore neither shoes nor sandals, and his wide, calloused feet were flecked with ancient scars. On his left hip he carried his *bèrang*, the large machete-like knife which is worn by every male Sumbawan of the uplands. Its wide, wooden sheath, attached to Anin's waist by a braided red thong of cotton, projected almost perpendicularly to the rear, giving his short silhouette the appearance of having a stubby tail. The *bèrang* handle was of smoothed brown ketimēs wood<sup>2</sup> and was gracefully shaped into the carved head of a beast with a rolled-up snout. This was variously described in the village as the head of a dragon (*naga*) or--more humorously--as that of a pig (*bawi*). Anin's purple and magenta Buginese sarong was looped around his neck and bunched at the shoulder to cushion the weight of his carrying pole. The lower section of the sarong loop fell diagonally, encircling his torso and dangled loosely just below the *bèrang* sheath on his left hip.

Made of tough and flexible wood, Anin's carrying pole was about five feet long, flat and unlaminated, and notched close to each of its pointed ends. From both these notches hung a balanced assortment of dark glass bottles and tied bags of tan matting; these varied containers held the essentials of Anin's household larder in the village. The two beer bottles, strung by their necks with twisted coconut fibre, were stoppered by greasy bits of brown rag and held kerosene and coconut oil. A small round basket (*sompé*) of wicker-like fibre was packed with lowland tobacco, gambir leaves, lime chunks, and betel nuts. Lashed to the front notch of the pole was a fibre bag filled with a *gantang* and a half (about 4 1/2 kilograms) of milled rice (*loto*), a two meter strip of blue cotton cloth, a palm leaf filled with small dried fish, and several packs of Javanese clove (*kretek*) cigarettes. Tied loosely over the bag was an oval coil of dried lontar palm<sup>3</sup> leaf, the covering for the cheroots smoked by all village men. Each item was important to the equilibrium of the village household: lacking the coconut oil neither rice cakes nor bananas could be fried; without the gambir, tobacco, and betel the housewife would have no quid to chew during the long chores of housekeeping; with no kerosene a household's crude tin lamp--fashioned of a cigarette can and a length of cotton string wicking--could not be lit.

The brang Semawa, Sumbawa River, lay ahead of us, skirting the town's outlying gardens and homesteads along its presently shrunken, dry-season bed. We approached across a wide sandy strip which during the barat (wet months: November-April) always lay at least ankle deep under water. At this point, not more than five kilometres from its mouth, the river bed was hedged

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2. *Protius* sp.

3. Sumbawan: *djontal* (*Borassus flabellifer* L.).

with bamboo fences enclosing banana groves, tobacco plots, and small fruit gardens. Although seemingly permanent, many such small river bank homesteads could expect no more than a temporary existence. They would endure until a new flash flood erupted from the distant mountains and, at a stroke, carried away their shacks, fences, and even livestock to the ocean. Such floods come mainly during the barat and especially between late November and February. The most recent serious flood had occurred in 1952 when a Dutch-built automobile bridge--among other items--had been carried away from this very spot.

But this was a calm July morning, and the Sumbawa river lay across our path rubbing gently against its western bank and filling no more than a fifth the breadth of its bed. We descended into that bed along a thick, irregular spit of stones projecting into the water. Stopping for a moment, but without shifting his shoulder pole burden, Anin removed a pack of kretek from his pocket and, with some pride, offered me a smoke. He wouldn't offer these cigarettes to everyone: a pack of ten cost half a gantang of rice and could be offered only sparingly.

With our cigarettes lit we waded across the brang Semawa in water that was clear, knee deep, and running gently, following a submarine corridor of rounded stones used generally as the fording path. On the opposite shore I noticed an older man standing, watching us silently as he held the rein of a horse drinking at the water's edge. Beyond a large boulder in the middle of the river ten yards downstream was his companion, probably his wife. She was a gray-headed woman who squatted immobile in the water. Her Javanese batik skirt was pulled above the water's surface and bunched beneath her armpits; her bare, flexed knees reached her shoulders. She gazed only into the water, oblivious to anybody who might see her as she relieved herself. Then, with her left hand, she reached behind to rub her buttocks in the slow current eddying around her waist. Both her stance and her attitude were characteristic of the older Sumbawan women and of males of all ages who, during the dry season, typically used the rivers for this purpose. Only the younger women, it would seem, conspicuously avoided this particular convenience, at least during the daylight hours.

We gained the western shore and followed the reappearing trail up an abrupt bank and through a break in the coconut groves lining the river. Here the well worn path became a road again and, further along on the right, would soon lead past the first kilometer post. Left by the Dutch, such stone posts marked the road's progress as far as Kaju Sengkal, a swidden village in the high foothills twenty-four kilometers distant. On several of the more eroded curves between the eighteenth and twenty-fourth kilometers such markers had since come to jut from precipitous rocky slopes as the sole surviving signs of a once level-cut roadway.

For the first two kilometers west of the town the road crosses generally flat, well populated landscape. While paralleled for a short distance by a narrow ridge dotted with close-cropped pasture, copses of drought-resistant bush, and fenced homesteads, it leads mainly through neatly tilled paddy fields which adjoin one another across low irrigation dikes and well-leaved djawa wood<sup>4</sup> fences. Fresh cut djawa wood stakes, once set into the soil, quickly take root and send out new branches, so that within a few seasons the farmer has a closely knit, living fence ringing his paddy field or garden. Along this stretch of road such fences meet the road bed at many points and from many angles, enclosing the irregularly shaped plots which, on a July morning, burgeoned with waist-high paddy. On one field to the left workers were already assembling to begin the harvesting. Women congregated in one group, dressed in long-sleeved black lamong (jackets), bright batik skirts or sarongs, and wide-brimmed hats. The men, clustered in another group and mostly still cold and numb from sleep, wore their sarongs over their shorts and long shirts. All moved slowly into the paddy.

Here in the central lowlands the paddy was somewhat late this year; the rains, continuing late into May, had delayed the final ripening. In the uplands around Anin's village, by contrast, the swidden paddy had been harvested more than six weeks earlier; even on the more easterly coastal plain the irrigated fields had also been reaped. The difference in the local times of rice harvest throughout west Sumbawa constitute one of the more enjoyable and useful aspects of life for the Sumbawan farmer, for it enables kinsmen and friends, scattered in villages both in mountains and lowlands, to visit and assist one another in the harvesting activities, which more than any other occasion in the annual calendar provide camaraderie, flirtation, laughter, and an abundance of food. Differences in local harvest times also help intermesh the various agricultural economies of the island, so that a boy and his younger sister from Rarak, for example, would turn up to help a cousin harvest his paddy in the lowland near the town, for which they would each receive one paddy bundle (gutés) per day. In case the upland swidden harvest had been meager or the family had heavy feast obligations, this additional staple could be important to the village larder. From villages higher in the mountains--Kaju Sengkak or beyond--might come groups of men, with their wives and sisters, who had not as yet cut their own paddy for the year due to the longer growing seasons at high altitudes. Such travellers might be genuinely desperate to earn sufficient paddy for themselves and their families until their own harvest.<sup>5</sup>

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4. The identification of this wood is uncertain; it is possibly a tree of value for batik dyes in Java.

5. For a general description and history of west Sumbawan society, see G. Kuperus, Het Cultuurlandschap van West Soembawa (Groningen, Batavia: Wolters, 1936).

Beyond the two kilometer marker the road began to rise; we followed a gradual curve along an even, almost imperceptible, ascent toward the distant pinnacle of Sumbawa's western peninsula, the twin peaks of Batu Lante mountain. Approaching a point where the road narrowed in a patch of high trees, we caught sight of a group of horses and people clustered in the roadway twenty yards ahead. With their horses tethered to shrubs some twelve traders--mostly women--squatted in a circle blocking the grassy road. The early light intensified our first glimpse of the women's white head towels, magenta Buginese sarongs, and glinting silver ankle bracelets. They were surrounded by flat baskets, carrying bags, and enamel washbasins, all heavily loaded with goods destined for the town market. Because the early sun was still low, they had not bothered to seek the shade trees as they haggled in the road.

The circle of dickering traders exchanged only short sentences quoting amounts in rupiah and sèn (cents). The active members in the bargaining sequences were an older man and woman who alternately crouched and stood as they moved about, inspecting baskets of bananas, small green limes, and gambir leaves. The man, Sidin, was a shrewd, garrulous man from Lawang village who made a practice of waylaying traders on their way from the highland down to the town market, aiming to browbeat them into selling their wares at prices lower than they would fetch in town. For this he relied upon his own considerable aggressive bargaining ability and upon ignorance on the part of the more occasional traders of recent price fluctuations in town. He made his middleman operations profitable by reselling the goods either in sporadic visits to remote hill villages or to those traders returning from town who had been unable to buy short-supply commodities they needed there.

A kilometer beyond the traders we left the main road on a path leading away to the northwest, a more direct route to Rarak. It was a winding trail that snaked its way towards the village through the matted sang brush<sup>6</sup> and scrubby tree clumps that dotted the tilted uplands. We crossed several of the dissected ridges which sink gradually from the central highlands into the lowland plain to the east. The prickly, pungent smelling sang brush often enclosed the path tightly to shoulder height, but at several spots it opened to allow glimpses of the Flores Sea lying far beyond--and by now some eight hundred feet below us.

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6. *Lantana camara* L. Often known also in Sumbawan as sang mamong, fragrant sang. The introduction and current importance of sang brush to a neighboring island have been extensively described in F. J. Ormeling, *The Timor Problem* (Groningen, Djakarta: Wolters, 1957). There are many close parallels between Timor and Sumbawa with respect to the position of sang in the agricultural economy.

Long before we gained the Rarak clearing, the regular thumping of the women at their rice boats guided us like a radio beam to the village. This rhythmical obbligate pervades the animal and human cacophony of every Sumbawan village and is expressed as well in many other moments of village life--as in the drum thumping loved as an evening's pastime and the unconscious finger-tapping in a villager's moments of repose. One could distinguish the chords struck by the various groups of women threshing (nudja) their paddy. There was the strident staccato clack of the six foot rice boat (rantok) worked by three women together. With her pestle each tapped out a cadence complementary to the others as she beat the rice husks clear of the paddy stalks. One woman was being playful and exuberant: she would interpolate an occasional quick sequence of raps along the rim of the boat to break up the staid booming meter of her two companions. A lower pitched, more regular thump would be the muffled voice of the upright cylindrical rice block (nisong), its wooden maw choked with chaff and half cleaned rice kernels. Here a mother and adolescent daughter stood erect on opposite sides alternately slamming home their pestles in graceful arm-length strokes. Finally, one could distinguish the efforts of four or six girls about twelve years of age who, in erratic thuds, were beating their pestles into a wide heap of loose paddy in the clearing.

Within a few minutes we came to Rarak. Beyond a waringin tree to the left of the road stretched the village clearing, cluttered with angular roofs weathered to various shades of dun and gray. These houses stood four to six feet off the ground on piles which, characteristically for Lombok and Sumbawa, rested mostly on flat stones dug slightly into the sloping ground. The dwellings seemed of various shapes and sizes and without coherent plan of arrangement. Sagging verandahs, bamboo ladders leaning against door openings, long ridge poles intersected by crossed peak sticks, slightly listing house piles, and curled, weathered patches of bamboo roof shingles all served to emphasize the divergent geometries of the house shapes, the hand-hewn quality of the architecture, and the relentless corrosive effects of tropical sun and rain.

The margin of the Rarak settlement was suggested by broken sections of a waist-high fence of rough stakes set close together into the ground. While the main settlement lay to the left of the road, an assortment of new and half-built houses stood prominently in a new clearing to the right. Beams, planks, and gaunt, unfinished house frames of pale yellow new lumber were scattered for ten yards along the roadway.<sup>7</sup> Although we had

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7. For further descriptions of Rarak and its society, see Goethals, "Task Groups and Marriage in Western Sumbawa," Intermediate Societies, Social Mobility, and Communication (Seattle: University of Washington, 1959); pp. 45-59; "The Sumbawan Village," in G. W. Skinner (ed.), Local, Ethnic and National Loyalties in Indonesia (New Haven: Yale Southeast Asia Studies, 1959),

yet to see a human inhabitant anywhere in the clearing, there was a slow tide of activity in the early morning sun. Tethered to a house frame, two diminutive horses (djaran) munched restlessly at the weeds along the edge of the clearing. A male water buffalo (kebōq) stood fastened by a coconut fiber rope and nose ring to a stack of newly cut ketimēs wood beams; he watched us approach while lapping his ringed nose with a ruminative tongue. The harness lashed to his back indicated he would soon drag a brace of the new beams to town, probably to a Chinese carpenter's shop. A pair of emaciated black dogs sniffed furtively at dismembered refuse piles along the village fence. While--like all dogs--unclean (nadjēs) to the Muslim villagers, their bent rumps, harrassed eyes, and scar-grooved backs marked their majority lot among Sumbawan dogs: neither groomed as esteemed hunting animals nor permitted merciful extinction, they lived as ravenous, outcaste parasites on the periphery of the village.

The main village entrance was marked by a wide break in the fence near which smoke curled lazily from a smoldering mound of discarded paddy stalks. Several chickens pecked spastically at occasional morsels on the hard-packed ground, and goats bleated in the brush nearby. Anin's house stood at the rear of the village in the row furthest distant from the road. Before the villagers began to shift their houses to the new clearing, he had lived opposite the old mosque. The building of the new mosque near the road on the eastern edge of the village was only the first step in a new alignment of village housing. Now that the dry season was at its height, the relocation of the village houses to the northern clearing was in full progress. Anin was about to sell his now crumbling previous house to another villager for the lumber it contained; he was already engaged in building a small, temporary home in the north clearing. This house, built hastily to maintain a good location in the new clearing, would eventually be replaced by a larger, more permanent structure. Hence, Anin had not established an auspicious building date for it; such would be determined with help from the mosque head (lebē), also Rarak's leading builder-shaman, only later when Anin was prepared to erect the permanent structure. The half-built abode, on low pilings, stood across the road in a cluster of other house frames, looking like a roofless bamboo chicken coop. It was hard to see how he, his wife, four small children, and his mother-in-law could conceivably be able to live in the one-room structure.

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pp. 12-33; Aspects of Local Government in a Sumbawan Village (Eastern Indonesia) (Ithaca: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1961); and "Rarak: A Swidden Village of West Sumbawa," in Koentjaraningrat (ed.), Villages in Indonesia (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), pp. 30-62.



According to my count the original village within the old fenced area then numbered forty-nine houses. If one were to look for neighborhoods within such a typically close-packed Sumbawan house cluster, one social dimension to be considered must certainly be that of the verandah row. The still discernable plan of the older, fenced section of the village had been--despite the subsequent variation in actual house size--one of parallel rows of houses. A gap measuring about four by eight yards and delineated by a shadowy rubble of wood chips, chicken dung, scattered stones, and shattered twigs showed where, until five days ago, Djameng's house had stood in the middle of the third row. Now it stood among the cluster of wooden skeletons across the road. The removal of an intact house to a new location within the village was similar to that of erecting a completely new house frame; it was an occasion of coordinated village labor with perhaps twenty or thirty able-bodied men helping to lift and carry the frame by short strained portages to the new location. For a really light-framed, single-roomed house this might even be effected without the usual preliminary stripping off of the walls and roof sections.

At Anin's house I found the verandah crowded. Close to the ladder at one end of the verandah squatted Anin, washing the sweat of our journey from his arms, shoulders, and face. Lonar, his wife, stood by him dressed in her black working clothes (kerèq lamong) and with a towel wrapped loosely about her thick long hair. She helped by pouring water for him from a large earthen crock; it splashed through the verandah's lath flooring and soaked into the stones, mud, and debris beneath the house. On the other end of the verandah Lonar's mother sat engaged in making thread from flat baskets of dried cotton spread out around her. The crooked stick railing encircling the rear end of the verandah was draped with a plaited mat, a dried goat skin, and a couple of dark-hued cotton sarongs drying in the sun.

"Sila mo!" called Lonar, flashing her betel-red grin. Anin picked up a towel, rubbed his face dry, and made his wife's greeting more specific by bidding me enter: "Entèk mo" (come up). I climbed the ladder, squatted to remove my sandals before entering, and nodded to Anin's elderly mother-in-law. To dispel her reserve, I asked her what kind of cloth she would make later from the thread she was spinning. She listed a sarong for herself and cloth for Anin's new travelling suit; then, she added, she would give some thread to her son's new wife, who had recently moved to this village from a distant interior community.

For a moment I watched her spinning, a skill most common among the older women of rural Sumbawa. She used the djentera (spinning wheel), operating it entirely by hand. The wheel itself was a frame formed of two wooden lathes bent into rough circles of the same size and mounted side by side on a

horizontal axle, which projected from an upright set into the wooden base block. Laced between the lath wheels was a string mesh to carry the cotton drive line running to the spindle set into the opposite end of the block. Anin's mother-in-law turned the wheel with her right hand and pulled the thread away with her left. For every seven or eight turns of her large drive wheel she would draw off an arm's length--about two feet--of thread between the whirling spindle and the cotton roll (goto) held in her left hand. Each time after drawing off this thread she would slip the new thread loose from the pitch-dabbed tip (ngar) of the spindle shank. Then she rotated the spindle in the opposite direction to take up this thread onto the thickening ball in the center of the spindle shank. Finally, she slipped the remaining slack thread back over the pitch dab and began again to rotate the drive wheel and draw off a new length of cotton thread. Occasionally, the thread would break if she stretched it too thin. This made her stop, pick up the broken end of the thread from the spindle, and splice it back into the cotton wad in her hand.

To avoid the low door lintel I bowed and stepped inside across the raised doorsill to join Anin. He was already seated cross-legged on a mat (tipar) in the front room waiting for me. I sat down cross-legged on the purple and tan mat usually reserved for guests, which Anin had unrolled along the front wall of the house near the door. He sat opposite on his own sleeping mat, and Lonar appeared almost immediately with a tin tray of coffee cups and a plate of fried bananas. She kneeled and placed the tray between us on the end of Anin's mat. Anin and I each took small china cups and stirred the thick black coffee with aluminum spoons to make the grounds settle. The bananas deep fried in fresh coconut oil while still slightly green were hot and delicious; they were of the sort known as ponti saba, a stubby, thick-skinned variety almost triangular in cross section and very common on Sumbawa.

Anin's house, although old and in poor repair, was typically Sumbawan in shape and style of construction. It was of medium size and rested on sixteen wooden tijang (house frame uprights), which were ranged in four rows of four equidistant members each. Internally, the house was then divided in standard fashion into three rectangular ruwang, sections formed by the tijang rows. Houses of only nine or twelve tijang were generally considered small and inevitably such houses had only two ruwang. Anin's sixteen-tijang house, measuring approximately twelve by twenty-four feet, had the ratio between width and length prescribed as most auspicious by the builder-shaman. The long wooden shafts that lay loosely together atop the overhead cross beams formed both the ceiling to the ruwang below and the floor to the lebang (attic) section above. These beams temporarily supported the considerable weight of much of Anin's recent paddy harvest. It was only in the older and larger village houses that one still noticed paddy being stored in this way. The

increasing local tendency was to store paddy separately in small rice barns (djompang, or gelompo) built on piles outside the village or at some remove from the main settlement. The danger of fire during the dry season and the threat of mice were the villager's chief reasons for storing his paddy separately, if possible.

In one of the incomplete house frames standing in the new section of the village across the road I had noticed, suspended from the intersection of a middle-row tijang and a cross beam, a rolled-up sleeping mat dangling by a piece of line at its middle. From the same upright hung a green, unhusked coconut, a plaited fiber sack, and a bamboo cylinder (latok) fitted with carrying thongs. I had previously seen these objects placed in the frame of other new houses and took this opportunity to inquire about their significance.

There was no special collective term for what I had seen, said Anin--adding that the objects also actually included a pillow, but this was rolled inside the hanging tipar; there was milled rice in the plaited bag, and the latok was filled with water. These things were placed inside the house frame, he explained, after it had been set up and the lebè had repeated prayers for the safety and good fortune of the new structure. When the builder-shaman had decided that the house owner could safely enter the structure after the erection of its main timbers, these objects would then be hung beside the center tijang. Although the house was still far from completed, the shaman's decision that the owner could enter it meant it was also safe for him to begin living there. In Rarak the two builder-shamans (sanro balé), old Talib and the lebè himself, always let the owner take up residence and hang his mat and pillow just after the prayers. After these objects were installed beside the center upright, or tijang guru, they might hang there indefinitely. There was no rule about their disposal but they were always a sign that the house was deemed safe for human occupation.

Anin went on: "If a Sumbawan is really to show his veneration properly, then he must have prayers said for the house (selawat balé) once each year. We build a house in order to be prosperous in our life and eventually so that we can die in our house and not out on the open ground. The house is our shelter when we are sick, and the older people used to say that we will use this same house when we get to heaven. But there has been a great deal of illness in the village in recent years, and we need a new area for our settlement. Perhaps this present area is no longer healthy. For this reason I am glad to move--even if only to a small crude house in another part of the village."

As Anin finished speaking, a friend, Djake, came through the door. He was a younger man in his early twenties, and although he was born in Lawang, in the past year he had cut his swidden within the Rarak tract. Djake was of the same generation as Anin's children and still unmarried. Yet, because his

mother was Anin's older second cousin, Djake, in addressing Anin, extended to him the kinship term for parent's younger sibling (endêq). He came into the room, crouched low, and greeted Anin with the traditional sembah gesture of respectful greeting. With his hands placed together he silently took Anin's hand between his own and nodded his head slightly. Then he turned, moved across the mat still in a crouched posture, and repeated the gesture taking my right hand in similar fashion between his own. After this he took a place crosslegged at the edge of the mat spread between Anin and myself; Anin called to Lonar in the rear of the house to bring another cup of coffee. In the expectant silence that fell between us, Djake took a flat tin box from his breast pocket, opened it, removed a tight coil of lontar palm leaf (dén djontal) and began to prepare himself a cheroot.

Djake was bringing Anin news of Lawang, their common village of origin, which Anin normally returned to visit about once a week. It was a settlement in the valley six kilometers from Rarak and of mixed economy; many Lawang farmers worked irrigated paddy fields and cultivated large garden homesteads (keban) with a considerable variety of crops. Because of the population growth in Lawang, its farmers were spreading into the areas under the traditional control of neighboring villages in order to stake out new land. Since Anin had married outside of his original village, he no longer farmed or lived in Lawang even though his brothers and father still held considerable property there.

The tidings from the valley were varied. Djake's older brother, who had married for the second time slightly over a year ago, had finally been able to buy a house and move out of his wife's parents' household. It was a small house, said Djake, but his brother had been able to buy it for twenty bundles of paddy--which was cheap, considering how much good lumber there still was in the frame. He planned to dismantle it and set it up again in his parents' keban some distance from the village. There he could expand the old frame with new beams and roofing and turn it into a new and considerably larger house. Djake went on to mention how the village headman, who had returned last year from his Mecca pilgrimage, had just completed the renovation of his own house, which he had fitted with red clay tiles made in the factory in town. They had been imported into Lawang by Chinese truck and must have cost the headman a lot of money--although, despite rampant speculation in the village, nobody knew just how much. Anin remarked that the village headman here in Rarak also wanted tiles on his house but, to judge from the recent expense of tiling the roof of the new mosque here, he could never afford to truck several thousand tiles in from town.

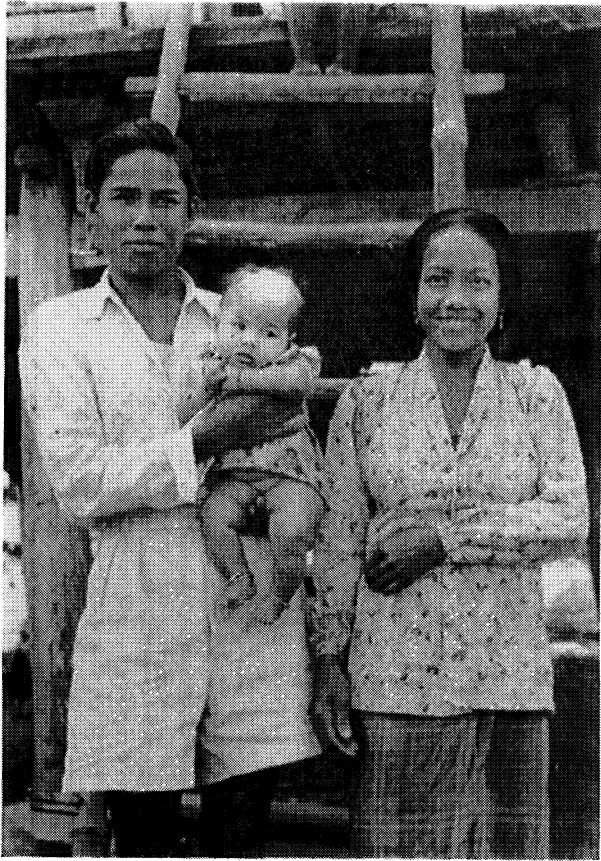
There was also trouble in Lawang, said Djake. A rumor had been circulating that a villager there had begun to steal goats, and it was reported that village goats were appearing for sale in the town market long after the owners missed them in Lawang.

It was always hard to trace these disappearances because only a village's tilled areas were always fenced, and a man's livestock generally wandered loose across the landscape. Only at times of feasts or sales, when the goats, water buffalo, and horses had to be caught and counted, were they rounded up. Just within the past three years the Veterinary Service in town had begun to inspect brands and systematically register the livestock owned in each village; disputes and suspicion developed easily, and several inter-village quarrels involving livestock were now pending before the District Court.

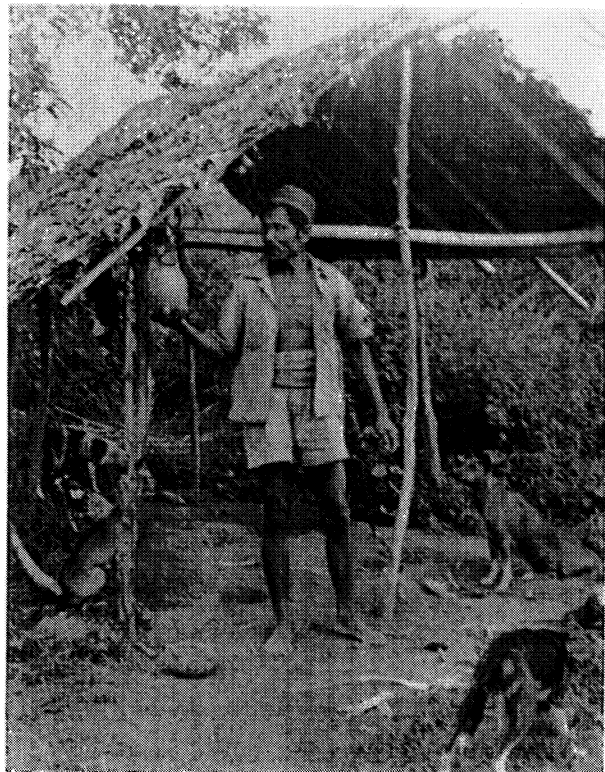
After relaying the news and slowly finishing his cheroot, Djake took his leave of Anin and me; he wanted to make two more village visits before returning to Lawang that afternoon. Since by this time the sky had clouded over, somewhat relieving the intense midday heat, Anin decided to visit his recently harvested swidden and collect the melons and tobacco which had lately ripened there. Anticipating both a cool melon and an even cooler afternoon bath in the river below Anin's hillside swidden, I elected to accompany him. The swidden lay almost two miles distant--at the end of an overgrown circuitous path which wound across two long ridges and down several steep slopes. It was not until late afternoon that we finally returned again to the village house, well loaded with melons, various vegetables, and a bunch of tobacco leaves.

Our return coincided with the late afternoon resurgence of village activity and sociability. Late afternoon was characteristically a time of preoccupation with one basic resource: water. It was the time when the evening meal demanded several latok of water for every hearth and when almost every villager, save the very young and the very old, adjourned to the edge of the village for his or her evening bath. During the balét (dry season) months from June through October, when the villagers (except for those few year-long residents of outlying homesteads) had returned to live in their permanent houses in the central settlement, this meant a certain common routine of place and time in drawing water.

A small stream curved erratically around the northeastern margin of the village settlement about a hundred yards from the main clearing. At two points along its lateritic gulley were located the village's main bathing and watering spots. Directly north of the village the stream meandered through a flat basin of eroded basaltic bedrock, and here, concealed by low-lying bushes and a circle of stunted trees, was the women's water hole. During the day Rarak's girls and housewives came in pairs or small groups to wash clothes, bathe, gossip, and fetch the water for their households. Seventy-five yards downstream the creek dropped five feet through a narrow cleft into a waist-deep pool enclosed by steep bushy banks; this was the men's water hole. One approached this along a strip of sand leading in from another path to the village. During the middle of the



Young couple in their best clothes  
the baby has medicinal rice paste  
on its shaved forehead.



The pengulu caring for the village  
hunting dogs before the medicine  
house (balé mēdo).



day this bathing spot was seldom used except by Rarak's small boys; village men and youths visited it in the early morning and the late afternoon. The women favored these same times for their bathing, too, but routine household chores took them to the water hole at many other times as well.

These two oases at the edge of the settlement were the terminal points for much of the late afternoon foot traffic passing by Anin's verandah. Across the clearing came Sasang, the pengulu (mosque official) of Rarak, a vigorous man in his fifties dressed in his customary patched cotton shorts and threadbare short-sleeved shirt. He hefted a shoulder pole dangling two empty latok at each end and carried a coconut shell dipper in his right hand. He always went to the water hole at this time, if only to fill his bamboos with water for the several hunting dogs locally entrusted to his expert feeding and care. In addition to his duties as pengulu, Sasang was the best shaman for dog protection in the village. A candy-striped towel was wrapped loosely about his head, but it was not certain he intended to employ it for a bath at the water hole; like a number of village men he often preferred to bathe using latok water on his house verandah during the warmer middle part of the day.

Hard on the heels of Sasang and also bound for the men's bathing spot came Sudin and Amin, who had just come from the soccer field and were hot, perspiring, and in high spirits. With their sarongs hitched high round their waists and towels looped carelessly about their disheveled heads they walked barefooted and holding hands, joking and laughing. These boys were each about seventeen years old, second cousins to each other, and close friends. They were also among the best ratép singers in the entire village. Whenever an invitation to a wedding came to Rarak from another village, these two were usually among those selected to represent the village there in singing the nightlong wedding chants. Sudin, who was short, stocky and moonfaced, was known as a hard worker and a skillful trader, and reputedly had been on the verge last year of marrying a cousin from a village across the valley. Local accounts of his finally frustrated marriage plans were fleeting and varied. Indications were that his potential parents-in-law had had strong objections to him at the time he became interested in this cousin and, although never completely voiced or made clear, these prejudices had spelled failure when he had attempted to marry the girl.

At the foot of the slope leading up to the village clearing there was a sudden glint of color: Rarak's women traders, each decked in bright finery, were now returning from the town market. Led by Kuler, a pudgy Sasak girl who had married and settled at Rarak, the five women approached in single file with their heavy, flat baskets riding serenely atop their heads. Their arrival would shortly precipitate noisy haggling and barter among a swarm of village housewives intent on acquiring the sections of printed cloth, bottles of kerosene, and packets of lowland tobacco which



they had been unable or too lazy to buy for themselves in town. Already a shout had gone up from Poro's small daughter, who had been on the lookout and now scampered off to tell her mother.

Kuler, the shrewdest and most energetic trading woman in the village, made her trips to the town market three times a week during the dry season. She took with her the stock of accumulated fresh vegetables, paddy, and tobacco to exchange at the market (or at Chinese stores) for sugar, dried fish, cigarettes, and the other commodities needed by a Rarak household. Her tiny house became a veritable store where she carried on avid barter with the other village women, who scrambled to her verandah to trade whenever she returned from an expedition to town. Events scheduled this week included two housebuilding feasts and, in three more days, the wedding celebration of Sidik and Siti, so there was bound to be considerable demand for Kuler's supplies and unusually intensive haggling on the verandah.

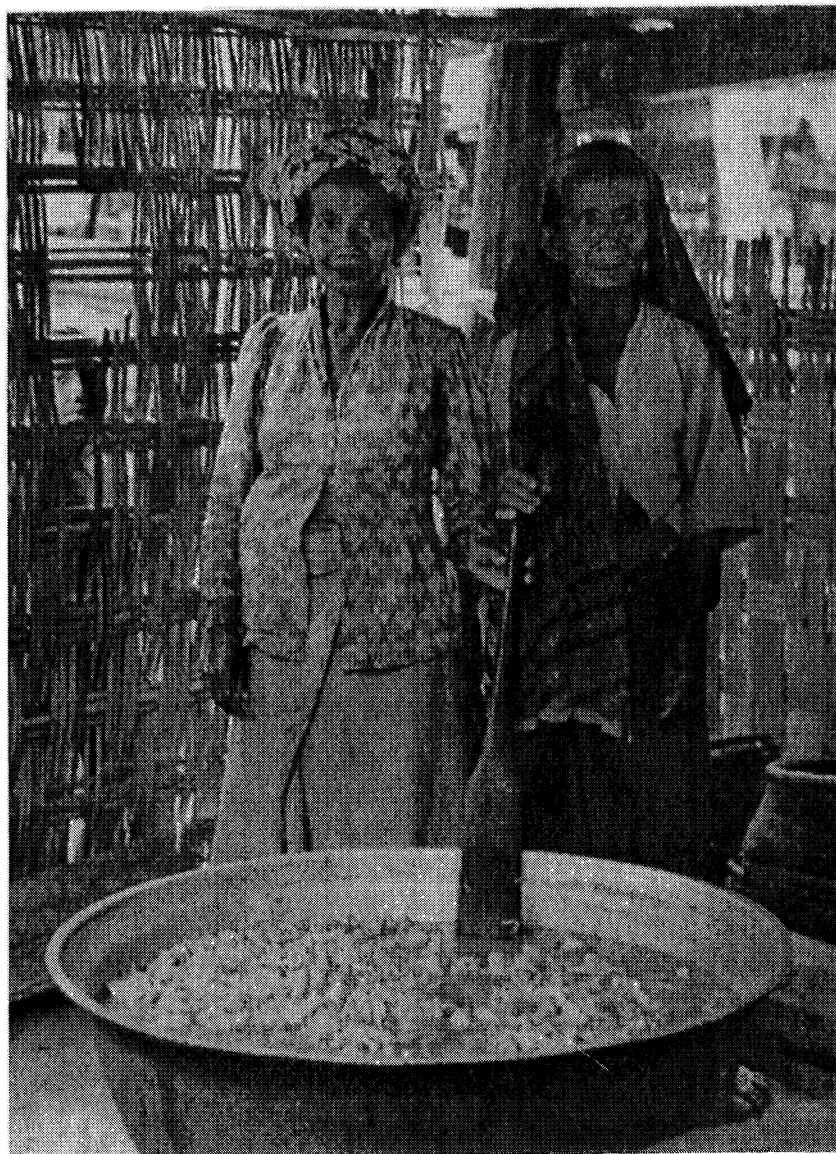
Kasim trudged into the clearing, leading a flock of noisy, naked boys and snapping dogs; he had just butchered a goat out by his swidden house and was bringing home the carcass to prepare for his brother Ahum's housebuilding festivities the next day. The heavy quarters of fresh goat meat were laced to the pole which he supported with upthrust shoulder and cocked head. Under his left arm Kasim carried his sleeping mat rolled around a mass of bedding and household equipment, for he and his wife had been late moving back to the village from their swidden house and were now hastily trying to complete the transfer of their household before Ahum's feast.

Next Pedil appeared across the clearing, dragging a long weathered beam about four yards in length. He had received it from the village headman, who had discarded it while building his own new house. The beam was squared roughly into ten-inch faces along its entire length. Hooking it with a borrowed axe, Pedil propped the beam between two humps of outcrop rock next to the village fence, and set about stripping off the weathered wood to make it more acceptable for re-use. Pedil's son, a child of about seven years, presently joined the circle of onlookers. The boy, naked and with his penis still smeared with the sēmē (medicinal paste) of his recent circumcision, brought a flat basket into which he quickly began collecting the dried wood chips that flew from the bite of his father's axe. These would provide the best possible fuel for his mother's kitchen hearth.

Two doors down in the same row of houses, a knot of small boys and girls had gathered to watch Poro clean a fresh deer skin. The deer had been taken earlier that afternoon about a mile from the village, where, on a steep slope near a water hole, eighteen villagers had surrounded it with the help of their dogs and killed it. Poro had received the skin for his role in spearing the animal while Djaho, whose two dogs had cornered the deer, fell heir to the horns; these special prizes

were in addition to the share of the meat that each of the participants had received. Now Poro had mounted the skin tightly on a hastily lashed frame of gray wood sticks. With sharp knives he and his two small sons scraped the remaining deer meat from the inside of the skin.

As dusk began to close over the village clearing, Anin's wife called us from the back of the house to the evening meal. With a clear moonlit evening in the offing, with Bulan Hadji festivities only a few days away, and with a village wedding scheduled for later in the week, many women would be working in the village clearing long into the night. Although the darkening lanes between the houses were already relinquishing their lively assortment of naked children and itinerant livestock, the hum of activity would probably, in fact, continue until well after midnight. The dour custom of closing up the village houses tightly at dusk for fear of sētan (bad spirits) would happily be in abeyance on such a bright night as this. Fires of rice chaff were already sputtering fitfully, and the atmosphere would soon be saturated with their thick odor. The clumping of the rice boats would begin again as the women reassembled in clusters to begin the round of evening threshing. Probably it would be an evening of singing, as well: village women enjoyed chanting humorous or nostalgic verses to alleviate the monotony of their single, most relentless chore. Men and boys would cluster on nearby verandahs or stand in knots by the fires to chat, smoke cheroots, and listen to the singing of their women. The memory of such evenings and the hopeful anticipation of yet others in future years would, I reflected, sustain many of villagers during the lean months which would begin again all too soon.



Two Sumbawan ladies have just cooked a wedding stew of goat meat and nangka fruit in a metal vat beneath one of the village houses.